

Amazing Grace

Balancing Work *AND* Family *by Connie Blaine*

No matter how far you rise up the professional ladder, you never escape challenges which all working mothers face: How to be two places at once; how to gas up the car, get the dry cleaning, shop for groceries and get dinner ready on time when you can't leave work early; how to pick up your daughter at soccer when a meeting is suddenly called, and most of all, how to find time for yourself—to relax and to exercise. It's especially hard for single mothers.

Even women with partners must deal with the burden of being mostly responsible for child rearing and housekeeping, which generally equal one full-time job. If both you and your partner have full-time careers, it's only reasonable to insist that you both do 1½ jobs, instead of only you doing what amounts to two full-time



jobs. You can also pay others to do chores: pick up, delivery, and dinners out, ordering on-line, etc. Don't accept an unfair burden; communicate and work it out. In the end you'll get what you settle for.

Because women's work and home lives constantly shift and evolve, women must learn to look, not for a permanent solution, but for a way of managing these issues when they arise—and they will.

Dealing with Stress: You can't avoid stress—it's a fact of life. Maybe the best skill any of us learns in life is to deal effectively with stress by developing strategies to minimize it. This boils down to one thing: take control of your thoughts and outlook. Remember, you are always making choices. You have the power to make different choices and change things, if you decide to. Of course, choices have price tags attached.

Weigh the price against the benefits, make the best choice you can, and move on. Worrying and second-guessing yourself only produces more stress.

Some basics for dealing with stress:

- ✓ Choose to have a positive attitude.
- ✓ Make meeting your own needs a top priority.
- ✓ Give yourself the recognition, appreciation and love you would give a friend.
- ✓ If there is somebody in your life that is running you down, making you feel worthless or unlovable, you must deal with that situation. You can set (and reinforce) firm boundaries, or you can choose to distance yourself from that person. Either way, you are taking control of your own life and meeting your own needs, which is what healthy adults do.

Explore Ways to Make your Job Suit Your Needs

The corporate world is becoming increasingly more willing to provide alternative work arrangements. But be aware that it will be up to you to justify your employer's flexibility, and there is always a trade-off.

Job sharing requires that you can find another person willing to work part-time and share one full-time job with you. Potential problems may need to be dealt with up-front and on an ongoing basis: Income will be reduced. Benefits may not be available, or may be scaled back. Also, close coordination is a must between the two people sharing a job, and both need to be willing to do a little extra on a daily basis to ensure that nothing falls between the cracks.

Flex time means being able to work at times other than the traditional business hours. It may mean starting and leaving earlier or later, taking a weekday off and working one day on the weekend, or any other non-traditional arrangement of your work time that your employer agrees to. Don't let your accessibility to coworkers and clients suffer—make extra concessions for their needs.

On the Web

http://www.advancingwomen.com/wk_balancing.html
<http://wflc.od.nih.gov/>
<http://www.familyfriendly.ie/workarrpage.shtml>

Telecommuting is working at home through computer, fax and phone. Your job may be one that is suitable for working from home if it relies on the computer and the phone for the most part—not on personal contact. Most people who telecommute only do so 2 or 3 days each week. Meetings, and other situations may require your physical presence at the company site, but can still be less than all day, every day. You must demonstrate that you can do the job just as well from home as you could in the office. Your employer must be convinced that the work is not hurt by your telecommuting.

To get the arrangement you want, you will need to negotiate with your employer. Remember, you have to prove that the employer and the work will not suffer in any way if you get the arrangement you want, so do your research on all potential objections before approaching your employer, and have a solution ready for each one.

- ✓ Be willing to bring up different alternatives. If someone else in your organization has paved the way, great. But you may have to start from scratch convincing your employer to change the way work gets done.
- ✓ Know what your own priorities are and be willing to compromise on the ones that are not so dear to your heart. For instance, you may need to give up some benefits or vacation time in order to get the arrangement you want.
- ✓ If job-sharing is what you want, find out *before hand* if someone else in your organization is willing to be the sharing partner for your job. Approach your employer together with your proposal. Make sure both of you realize the potential trade-offs and problems in advance.
- ✓ Be ready to prove that you can get the job done with no negative effects to your employer.

Employers today are more willing than ever before to accommodate working mothers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently reported that as more working mothers seek lengthy leaves to care for their families—or quit jobs entirely—some companies are devising new ways to lure them back to work. These may include allowing longer leave for having & raising children, allowing more flex time and telecommuting and luring women back on a part-time basis initially.

Companies say that keeping ties with old workers is often cheaper than recruiting and training new workers. This is an argument that can work in your favor when you approach your employer.